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Modern master of ink

Xu Li's confident brush strokes and powerful manipulation of ink instills his characters with life.

A grassroots artist from Fujian Province, Xu gave up life in the art academy to pursue creations closer to the people.

His ancient ghosts and ladies come to life on Chinese paper.

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Gaokao may switch focus to skills

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'China' label a hurdle for musicians

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Green cards aimed to win back emigrants

By ZHAO HONGYI
Beijing Today Staff

As the green card system enters its 10th year, officials are shifting their focus to winning back overseas Chinese.

"The existing green card system has attracted many elites from around the world," said Qiu Yuanping, director of the Overseas Chinese Bureau under the State Council. "Now we want to focus on serving overseas Chinese who want to return to live and work in China."

According to the Entry and Exit Bureau's records, China has granted more than 20,000 green cards to foreign nationals, including many overseas Chinese, for the purposes of settling in the country.

New regulations would further lower the requirements for foreign residents who want to enter the country to settle down or open a business.

More than 70 million Chinese nationals have emigrated and taken foreign citizenship over the last several decades, many of them as students who chose to remain abroad after completing their schooling.

Many have expressed an interest in returning to reside in China.

"We are working to improve the laws and regulations to help these overseas Chinese who would like to return to the country," said Yin Weiming, minister of the Ministry of Human Resources and Welfare.

"The free entry and exit of former citizens and other foreigners is a high priority," Yin said.



China has granted 20,000 green cards in the past decade.

CFP Photo

Water, gas and transportation costs going up

By ZHAO HONGYI
Beijing Today Staff

The city's latest round of price increases will not be limited to the Beijing subway network, officials said.

Beijing has announced plans to increase the cost of water, gas and all forms of public transportation by the year's end.

Zhao Lei, director of the city's Reform and Development Bureau, said the water price hike is a result of the South-North Water Transfer Project, which is due to be completed later this year. The project's pipelines will divert 44.8 billion cubic meters of water each year from Hubei Province to Beijing.

China's increasing gas costs are due to dependence on imports from Russia, Australia and the Middle East, he said.

Gas billing will be broken into a three-tier system, Zhao said. Households that consume within the first tier will not see a price increase. Homes that use enough gas to make it into the second tier will be charged 50 percent more for their gas use. The third tier of usage would carry a penalty increase of 80 percent.

More controversially, the city plans to raise the price of all buses and subways this year.

City officials said they want to introduce a pricing system similar to the ones used in Shanghai and Guangzhou, which bill passengers for the stations they pass rather than the current flat rate of 2 yuan.

The transportation system would issue one-week, two-week and one-month tickets to reduce the rates for commuters who depends on these transportation arteries, but what discount they would offer has not been announced.

"We are postponing comment until after the public hearing," Zhao said. The hearing will be before the end of June.

Cao Songlei, an office worker who commutes into the city center every day, bemoaned the price hikes. "Why is the city encouraging urban sprawl by building new lines only to punish us for commuting? This will cost a lot, considering I only earn several thousand yuan per month," Cao said.

Beijing has grown dramatically over the last decade. Many of the city's new core communities are located in traditionally suburban areas.

The cost of renting a home downtown has more than tripled over the last decade, even as salaries remain stagnant. Many workers have taken refuge in distant communities such as Tongzhou, Tiantongyuan and Daxing to make ends meet.

For low-income workers, Beijing's fixed-price public transportation system has been essential.

The municipal government is negotiating with the Beijing Subway Company to reduce its subsidy payments, which currently amount to 17 billion yuan per year.

Universities told to "go bankrupt," refocus on skill training

By ZHAO HONGYI
Beijing Today Staff

The annual National Higher Education Entrance Examination, popularly known as the Gaokao, remains the gateway through which all college-bound high school students must pass.

But education administrators are discussing a nationwide reform that would open a new admission track for skill-based admission into China's higher education.

"This would allow students to decide their future when they turn 16," said Lu Xi, vice minister of education, while speaking at the China Development High-End Forum. "Either track would help them to achieve their life goals," he said.

China's university system has an overwhelming focus on academic education. As the result, many graduates complete school with a strong background in theory but limited ability to apply what they learn to practical tasks.



Students pour into a yearly recruitment fair.

CFP Photo

The reform would upgrade many technical secondary schools and junior colleges to the same certification level as universities.

"The skill-focused universities would be invaluable for training engineers, high technicians and other skilled laborers," Lu said.

In 2013, more than 1.4 million students chose the skill-based track in a trial run of the new Gaokao.

But there may be more at stake than the mere interests of students.

China has been criticized for having a

surplus supply of university graduates. Lu said Chinese universities focus on training students for academic research, and most graduate woefully unprepared for the real world's workforce.

"Last year, 6.99 million university graduates began the search for a job. Only 77.4 percent could find an entry level position," Lu said.

By contrast, students with skill-based training had a 95 percent success rate.

The new multi-track path is modeled on the higher education system used in Germany and Switzerland.

In Germany, some 78 percent of college-bound students focus on skill-based education: in Switzerland, 82 percent of the students seeking higher education learn a skill-focused curriculum.

"China's enterprises need engineers, skilled technicians and workers on the front line," Lu said.

More than 600 universities will be repurposed for skill and professional training education.

Soap series say no to 'traditional' marriage

By JEMINCE JIA

Special to Beijing Today

Concepts of love and marriage in Chinese society have gone through tremendous changes during the past six decades.

From having no say in an arranged marriage to gradually having the freedom to choose a partner, Chinese youth are discovering that choice is essential to being an independent human.

Young Chinese, especially those living in big cities, prioritize happiness in marriage – a shift being emphasized in domestic television dramas.



My Weirdo Son

Even with the sweeping advance of the Korean soap opera wave, local dramas and comedies are winning the hearts of viewers born in the 1980s by presenting topics painfully relevant to their generation.

Young adults are becoming increasingly tied up in debt, love and work troubles as they leave their schools and enter the workforce. With more of the generation reaching their late 20s, they face extreme pressure from helicopter parents as eager to manage their marriages as they did their educations.

In its most pernicious form, this desire turns into a battery of arranged marriage interviews.

The domestic comedy *My Weirdo Son* follows the story of one 30-year-old man as his crazy parents attempt to manipulate and manage his life.

But with the stories shared on popular Chinese forums, the 'crazy' parents appear tame in comparison to what many youths endure.

"When I was 27, my parents forced me to marry a beautiful woman. But I never felt she was the right person for me," said a netizen writing under the name cwq69339. "I struggled to persuade my parents to call off the marriage but failed. Then I tried to persuade the woman, but she refused to listen."

"I finally compromised and married her. But even after we married, my parents continued to micromanage our life. This is not the life I want, and I feel angry about it every day," he said.

Hui Hongyun, a 31-year-old woman, told how her parents viewed her as inferior to men and constantly pushed her to find a rich husband – even if it was someone she hated.

My Weirdo Son calls to attention how many children are forced to compromise their principles, emotions and relationships to comply with the overwhelming demands of their parents.

But many young adults are fighting back against controlling parents.

The young man in the show fights his parents' interference by choosing to wed a divorced young woman with a 5-year-old child – a move that flies in the face of what Chinese parents consider to be a "good match."

However, the show has a happy ending and illustrates how the single mom and "weird" son come to terms as more adults battle their parents' wishes in pursuit of happiness.

Another family comedy, *Old Husband*, brings the issue of spring and autumn marriages to the big screen by telling the story by following a young beauty who marries a man who is nearly the same age as her father.

In Chinese tradition, parents' consent and blessing are often prioritized by new couples – having a son-in-law the age of the wife's father is considered to diminish the family's authority.

In spite of "firm" cultural traditions, marriage is a shifting topic for Chinese youth. While arranged marriages were common in the 1950s, prenatal betrothal was the norm only a few generations earlier.

The laws and practices of marriage have always shifted with the times, and modern ideas such as the acceptance of same-sex love and cross-generations marriage could lead to changes in China's marriage law during the coming decades.

(Staff writer Bao Chengrong contributed to this story)



Old Husband

CFP Photo

Sorrowful beauties of the modern era

By ZHAO HONGYI
Beijing Today Staff

Zhang Botao searches for remnants of ancient tradition in China's modern day open and driven women. Since 2010, he has been working on oil paintings inspired by ancient beauties at his studio in the Songzhuang artist community.

His paintings blend modern figures with ancient oriental traits. Each of the women in his works show eyes full of desperation and sorrow.

As an oil painter, Zhang continues a tradition that began with traditional ink paintings. In the distant past, scholar artists enjoyed painting portraits of sorrow-filled beauties. In Zhang's work, these women are updated to be wearing classical European dress – a hint at Westnization.

Zhang's work has been commercially successful, with most of his portraits fetching 30,000 yuan online.

Born in 1970 in the heart of northeast China's Daxing'anling Mountains, Zhang studied traditional painting at Harbin Normal University and graduated from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 2004 with a degree in oil painting.

"It's no easy feat for a boy from the mountains to enter one of the nation's most prestigious art schools, but it was one I was determined to achieve," Zhang said at the opening of his latest exhibition.

"I paint girls to show that I still have beautiful hope of life," he said. "I am following in the footsteps of the Ming Dynasty painter Tang Ying and 19th century Britain's Bern Johns."

Art Gallery

Where: East Block, Songzhuang Art Zone 101118

When: Through May 10 (Monday closed)

Tel: 5128 2297

Web: ccartd.com



Chinese beauties in European costume

Photos provided by Art Gallery

書中自有黃金屋
書中自有顏如玉
甲午新春徐星

Reclining ancient scholar

Modern master of Chinese ink



Monk painting on a wall



Zhong Kui



Zhong Kui, the ghost catcher

By **ZHAO HONGYI**
Beijing Today Staff

Using simple lines and traditional ink, Xu Li brings ancient ghosts and ladies to life on xuan paper.

Xu is a representative of China's "grassroots" artist movement, a group of classically educated artists who have given up on academics to focus on creating art that is closer to everyday life.

Born in 1961 in Fujian Province, Xu is the vice chairman of the province's Association of Artists and an active figure in its literary association.

Xu brings his classical training into each of his pieces, using confident lines and powerful manipulation of ink to instill Zhong Kui, Laodao and other popular symbols with life. In his landscapes, the lines becoming flowing rivers and strong trees.

His ancient ladies are composed of complicated lines that, while mysterious up close, come together to create beautiful images when viewed from a distance.

"Xu Li's work has been a turning point in the modern history of Chinese ink painting," said Yan Tan, curator of the solo exhibition.

Since the late 1980s, he has been donating his works to museums all over the world. His creations are currently exhibited in the Museum of Macao, the US Oriental Museum, Helsingor Museum and Wellington Museum.

Art Bridge Gallery

Where: D09-1, 2 Jiuxianqiao Lu, Chaoyang District

When: Through April 28

Tel: 6433 1798

Web: 798artbridge.sina.net



Scenes of the Taihang Mountains
Photos provided by Art Bridge Gallery



Confucius murmuring his teachings



Singers torn over embracing 'Made in China' label

By DIAO DIAO
Beijing Today Intern

The world is slowly discovering that the Chinese music landscape is not limited to folk tunes and revolutionary ballads.

As China's indie rock, blues and trip-hop artists head abroad, avoiding the "Made in China" label has become a major concern.

China's music industry does not have the best reputation. In spite of the great achievements of independent artists, the domestic music industry remains obsessed with fresh-faced idols cultivated in the Korean and Japanese pop model.

It's a world where trendiness drums out any notion of musical talent.

"What we're seeing is an aggressive commercialization of Chinese music," says Da Meng, the bassist of Screaming Kong.

Screaming Kong was founded four years ago by a group of four high school friends. Although the band's strong grassroots following has brought it several offers from bigger labels, its members have rejected them all.

"We're not signed because we don't want to be," Da Meng said.

China's music industry has inherited some of the worst elements of the Korean model. Executives focus on building a cult of personality around singers and



Photo by CFP

groups fueled by commercial appearances on variety shows and front page placements.

It's a schedule that leaves any signed band with little room for artistic growth.

When talking about their dream, Screaming Kong's members say they want to sing for friends and strangers rather than appear on the big stage. "We've even thought about traveling overseas as street performers," said Feng Hanbo, the drummer.

"Anyone can perform in the Golden

Hall of Vienna or the Sydney Opera House if they can afford the rent. I wouldn't want to play one of those venues unless we were invited," he said.

But invitations are unlikely as foreign audiences remain puzzled about what "Chinese music" is.

The independent and commercial scenes are sending the world very mixed messages about Chinese music, and at the moment the commercial scene is winning. Many reviewers, composers and producers see a bright future for China's



Photo by Google

commercial music as domestic TV idol contests win attention abroad.

"When we look at the singers who have found fame on stage, we can see the potential for Chinese music to reach a higher level," said Shan He, a professor at the Tianjin Institute of Music.

As a reviewer on the idol TV show *I Am a Singer*, Shan's experience with Chinese music is intimately tied to the commercial side of the industry. But even there he sees hope.

"I am seeing musicians more dedicated to their work and really thinking about what they are singing," he said. "Seeking a breakthrough is the way they can improve their music."

Hua Chenyu, the champion of 2013's *Super Boy*, was praised by American Idol judge Paula Abdul for his personal interpretation of Lady Gaga's "Poker Face" during the competition.

But many remain guarded about whether idol-oriented development will give China anything new to bring to the world's stage.

"We have no idea what our future will be like, nor how the music in China will grow. But a good or bad result depends on the audience," Da Meng said.



Photo by Screaming Kong

Fashion shopping meets the social Web

By DIAO DIAO
Beijing Today Intern

Online shopping has come to dominate the Chinese landscape, and more stores are popping up to cater to the needs of different generations.

The popular online fashion mall Meilishuo bills itself as the top site curated by and for young fashionistas.



Shoes by
Yiyi Liangpin

These pillar-heeled shoes topped the week's bestselling list. Their wine color gives them a timeless, nostalgic look that's suitable for all age groups. The patterns on the front and three leather straps are a nod to their original London style.

Price: 229 yuan
Web: meilishuo.com/
share/item/2497897475



Jacket by 1313

This sleeveless black jacket made late March's "Trendy" list. It looks a bit like one of the robes worn by witches and wizards in the Harry Potter movies. The hat looks almost exactly like the film's Sorting Hat. These smart and handsome styles are favored by young girls looking for a more personal look.

Price: 139 yuan (free delivery)
Web: meilishuo.com/
share/item/2580947111



Meilishuo was founded in 2009 to collect the top trends in youth fashion. With more than 11.5 million active users every day, the site does an impressive job of curating the most popular looks.

Its front page highlights popular fashion keywords of the month and indexes clothes by their material and style to show what the hive mind considers to be a fashionable match.

It also profiles the most popular Korean soap operas to index the characters' wardrobes, such as the clothes worn by Gianna Jun in the popular series *My Love from the Star*. Additional catalogs index clothes, dresses, shoes, bags and accessories.

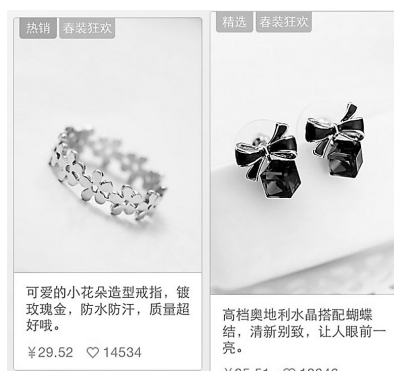
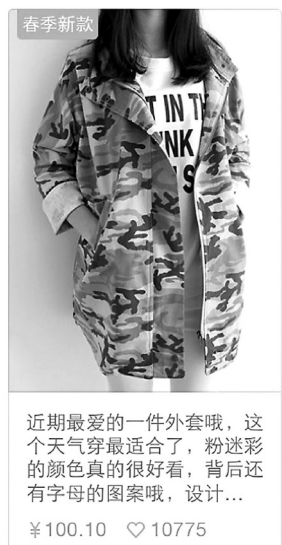
Users can upvote or downvote fashion lists to weigh in on the popular trends of the season and

gauge what colors may be fashionable in the next.

Each product page contains a heart-shaped "Love" button that lets users pin an item and add it to a private collection. The collections become personalized fashion magazines that show what each user thinks is hot.

Meilishuo also maintains its own magazines sorted into European and American styles, Korean and Japanese styles, and "Sweet" or "Nostalgic" looks.

The site offers steep discounts on cosmetics, skin care products and make-ups by both domestic and foreign brands. Discounts run for about eight days and include a preview of which item is coming up next. Users who complete a payment using WeChat are given a 10 percent discount.



0.1°C

With 6,054 items, 0.1°C is one of Meilishuo's best known shops. It carries clothes in bright, Macaron colors like peppermint green, navy blue, lemon and orange. Its long and short dresses, pants and T-shirts are made of cotton and are comfortable to wear according to the comments.

Web: meilishuo.com/
shop/101673

Photo by Meilishuo.com

Nuts about noodles



Latiaozi

Kung pao chicken
Photo by Diao Diao

Saozimian



Beef noodle soup

By DIAO DIAO

Beijing Today Intern

Whether eating out or eating at home, Beijingers eat noodles all year round. Many of the best and most traditional noodles are available at small neighborhood eateries that remain unexplored by outsiders.

Noodle king of the west side

In the decade since it opened, Xiyuwang Niuroumian has become a legend among students at China Foreign Affairs University.

The restaurant is as famous for its beef soup lamian as it is for its cold noodles and other dishes. It also serves up a wide range of popular barbecued appetizers.

Between the surrounding community and the college campus, the restaurant's tables are never empty at lunch.

Noodles are freshly made and available in broad, standard and angel hair varieties. A large bowl of beef noodle soup costs 15 yuan. The small bowl is 14 yuan, but isn't really that much smaller.

Appetizers such as cucumbers with minced garlic, tofu skin with celery and sliced tofu cost 6 yuan. The appetizers with meat cost about 8 yuan.

The restaurant also makes Uyghur style latiaozi (13 yuan), a dish of hand-pulled noodles boiled and tossed with tomatoes, onions and green peppers.

Chicken, lamb and squid kabobs are available for 5 yuan and come sprinkled with cumin and other seasonings.

For those who don't love noodles, the restaurant serves several kinds of fried rice and small dishes priced 10 to 15 yuan.

As in most small lamian restaurants, you pay at the door and get a receipt to hand to the cooks. Appetizers are served at the first window, noodles at the second and barbecued kababobs and latiaozi at the third. The waitresses told us that most customers are regulars who live or study nearby.

Xiyuwang Niuroumian

Where: 31-1 Zhanlanguan Lu, Xicheng District

When: 10am-10pm

Tel: 6899 5342

Traditional noodles at home

By DIAO DIAO

Beijing Today Intern

Zhajiangmian and xihongshi jidan mian (tomato-and-egg noodles) are the most common noodle dishes cooked by Beijing families.

Although every family has its own style of preparation, you can easily cook your own with these simple recipes.



Photo by CFP

Zhajiangmian

Ingredients:

- 150 grams of fatty pork
- 40 grams of Liubiju bean sauce
- Oil
- Huangjiu
- Ginger
- Green onions
- Dark Soy sauce
- Sugar
- Noodles

Steps:

1. Dice a small length of ginger, the green onions and pork.
2. Heat the oil and add the green onions and ginger. Stir fry until it become fragrant.
3. Add the pork and stir fry for 2-3 minutes. Add the bean sauce and huangjiu and cook until the pork is well done.
4. Add a spoonful of sugar and some water and cook for another 3-5 minutes. Keep stirring to prevent the paste from burning.
5. Boil the noodles and toss them with the paste.

Xihongshi Jidan Mian

Ingredients:

- 2 large tomatoes
- 2 eggs
- Salt
- Sesame oil
- Peanut oil
- Ginger
- Green onion

Steps:

1. Clean the tomatoes, discarding the seeds, and chop them into pieces. Break the eggs into a bowl, add salt and beat vigorously. Cut the ginger and green pepper into small pieces.
2. Heat the oil and quickly cook the egg. Remove and set aside.
3. Heat the oil and begin to stir fry the tomatoes, ginger and green onion. After two minutes, return the egg to the pan. Add sugar and cook another 2 minutes.
4. Add two cups of water and a pinch of salt. Boil for 5 minutes to thicken the mixture. Remove it from the pan and flavor with a few drops of sesame oil.
5. Boil the noodles and toss them with the tomato mixture.

